American Cancer Society Responds to the Death of Dana Reeve
Statement by Carolyn D. Runowicz, MD, American Cancer Society

Atlanta 2006/03/07 -"All of us at the American Cancer Society are saddened to learn of the passing of Dana Reeve due to lung cancer. We send our deepest condolences to her family. Ms. Reeve showed strength and courage in the face of tremendous adversity, and that strength was so evident during her all-too brief battle with the disease. The volunteers and staff of the American Cancer Society have long admired Ms. Reeve's work and vitality as a health advocate and mother. In February 2005, the Society's Eastern Division honored her as Mother of the Year for her devotion to her son Will and stepchildren Matthew and Alexandra, as well as for her dedication to improving her community.

“Ms. Reeve’s strength and her work have brought tremendous attention to two terrible disease conditions, spinal cord injuries and lung cancer. Her death serves as a reminder that in 2006 there will be an estimated 174,470 new cases of lung cancer and an estimated 162,460 Americans will die from the disease.

“Ms. Reeve’s tragic passing reminds us that roughly 10 percent of all lung cancer cases occur in people without a history of smoking, and that we need to increase support for research in this area. Lung cancer occurs in people who have never smoked, even though cigarette smoking is by far the biggest risk factor for lung cancer in the U.S. Known risk factors that may affect people regardless of their personal history of smoking include exposure to secondhand smoke and radon, as well as occupational exposure to asbestos and certain chemicals and metals. Genetic susceptibility is thought to play a greater role in people who develop lung cancer at an early age. Fewer than three percent of lung cancers occur in people under the age of 45.

“Progress against lung cancer will require further efforts to prevent cigarette smoking as well as advances in early detection and treatment. The good news is per capita cigarette consumption is now at the lowest level since World War II and that lung cancer death rates have fallen 17 percent in men from 1990 to 2002. Both incidence and death rates have leveled off in women. Nevertheless with 46 million former smokers in the U.S. and the inevitability that some people who have never smoked will develop lung cancer, continued research into early detection and into ways of improving and developing targeted therapies, which have shown promise in some select groups, remain very important. The American Cancer Society has been involved in ongoing research into early detection using CT scanning as well as the development of new targeted therapies. The American Cancer Society has been and continues to be a leading advocate for the passage and implementation of strong smoke-free laws. These laws play a critical role in protecting the entire public from the dangers of secondhand smoke. Currently, only 39.4 percent of Americans are protected by smoke-free laws in 15 states and more than 2,100 communities across the country.

“Ms. Reeve’s death and that of Peter Jennings are tragic reminders of the enormous toll of suffering and death from this terrible disease. Many people have questions about lung

cancer, and many smokers are looking for ways to quit. The American Cancer Society offers support and hope for people diagnosed with lung cancer and their families as well as resources to help smokers quit 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including its own Quitline, which since its launch in May 2000 has provided services to more than 150,000 callers. For more information, call 800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org."

Overview: Lung Cancer
How Is Lung Cancer Found?

Since most people with early lung cancer do not have any symptoms, only a small number of lung cancers are found at an early stage. When lung cancer is found early, it is often because of tests that were being done for something else.

Screenings Tests for Lung Cancer

Screening is the use of tests or exams to find a disease (such as cancer) in people who don't have any symptoms. Because lung cancer often spreads beyond the lungs before it causes symptoms, a good screening test to find lung cancer early could save many lives.

Chest x-rays and checking sputum (spit) under a microscope to look for cancer cells have been studied for several years. Studies have shown that this kind of screening does not find many lung cancers early enough to improve a person's chance for a cure. For this reason, lung cancer screening is not usually advised even for people at higher risk, such as those who smoke.

Recently a new x-ray method called spiral CT scanning has shown some promise in finding early lung cancer in smokers and former smokers. But it has not yet known if this test will lower the chances of dying from lung cancer. To find out the answer to that question, a large study is going on. It is called the National Lung Screening Trial (NLST). When the results come out, we will have a better idea whether spiral CT scanning will catch lung cancer early enough to save lives. Until then, current smokers should keep in mind that the best way to avoid dying from lung cancer is to stop smoking.

Common Signs and Symptoms of Lung Cancer

Although most lung cancers do not cause symptoms until they have spread, you should report any of the following to your doctor right away. Often these problems are caused by something other than cancer. But if lung cancer is found, getting treatment right away could help you live longer and relieve symptoms.

- a cough that does not go away
- chest pain, often made worse by deep breathing
- hoarseness
- weight loss and loss of appetite
- bloody or rust-colored sputum (spit or phlegm)
- shortness of breath

- infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia that keep coming back
- new onset of wheezing

When lung cancer spreads to distant organs, it may cause:

- bone pain
- weakness or numbness of the arms or legs
- dizziness or seizure
- yellow coloring of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- masses near the surface of the body, caused by cancer spreading to the skin or to lymph nodes in the neck or above the collarbone

Less often, there are some other clusters of symptoms (called syndromes) that can point to a possible lung cancer.

Source: American Cancer Society - Revised: 01/01/2005